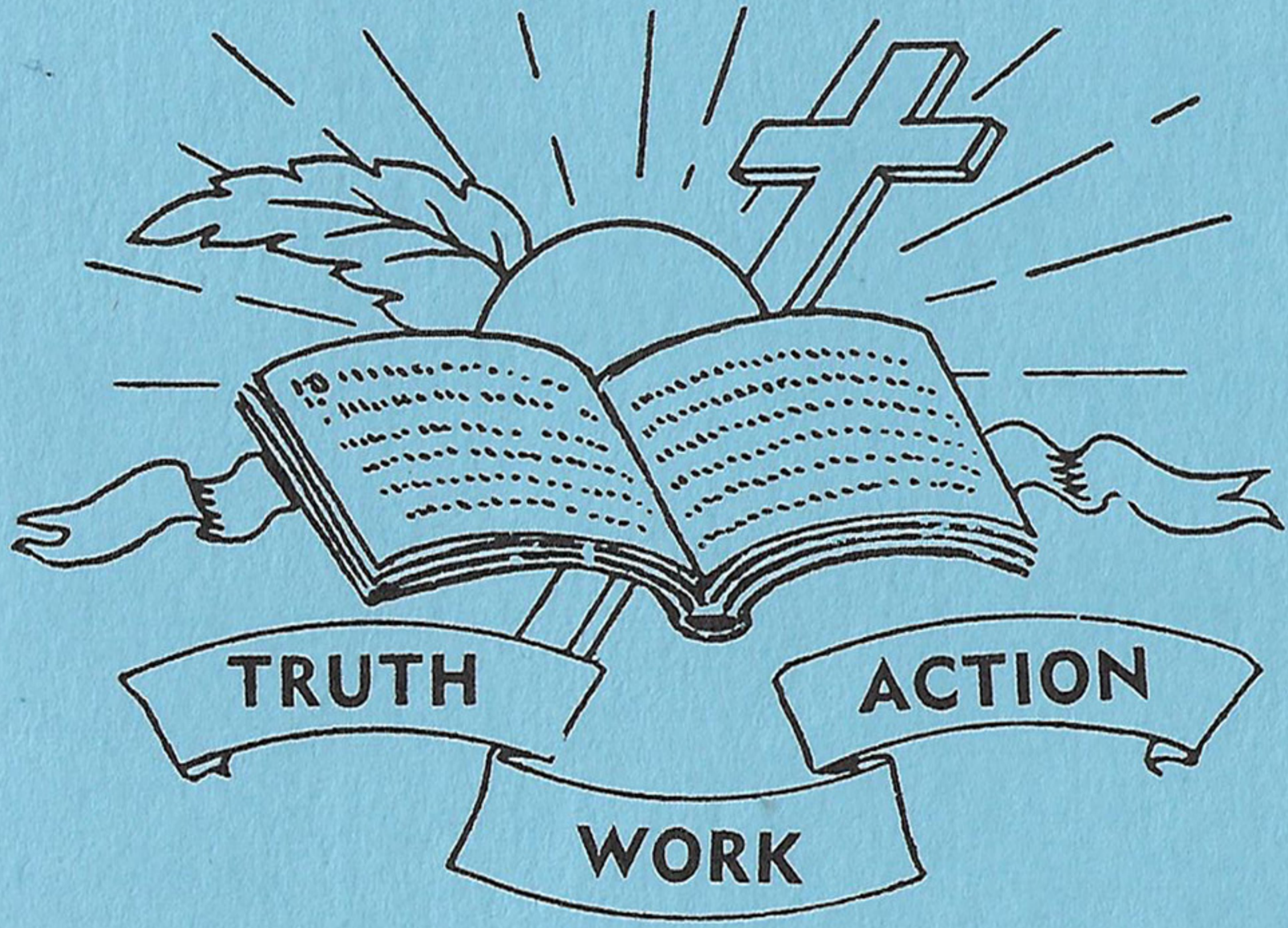
I AM A POLISH NATIONAL CATHOLIC



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YOU AND I ARE OF THE POLISH NATIONAL CATHOLIC FAITH.

"What does it mean in comparison to other denominations?" We are so often asked when we are introduced in social situations. Most often our members reply, "We are catholic, but nonpapists; we have a church constitution, a democratic form of church government with men and women, lay and clergy, as elected delegates to our diocesan and national synods; locally we have elected parish committees equally responsible to the parish-at-large to the pastor and to the diocesan bishop for the husbandry or management of all parish properties, financial and real. Then too, we use Polish, and now English for the second generation, in our liturgy, but we adhere to Polish traditions and cultural patterns in our corporate expressions of faith. Our priests are allowed to marry, it they so choose; candidates for bishops are elected at our national synods; we have an Executive Council presided by the Primate of our Church in which we have both lay and clergy administration."

"We are one of the more recent reformation movements in that our Polish National Catholic Church was organized in 1897 here in the United States, grew in size to established parishes in the Northeastern quarter of America, some in Florida, one in California plus some in Canada. Most unique however, is the fact that as an organized church of an ethnic group here in the Western Hemisphere, we took our movement to the land of our forefathers, i.e. Poland."

These are the most frequent statements concerning our Church. There are other aspects of our Church, however, the idealogical and theological, which we also wish to have known. As for example, that we are the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

"But how can this be? Some of our interrogators may enquire. Does it not imply, when you say 'Polish National Catholic' that you are propagating your own type of catholicism?"

"Not at all. We adhere to the one and only Church founded by Jesus Christ. The Church which remained undivided historically until the year 1054. In reality, a break in the Church was in effect before that year. Following the Seventh General Council, Nicea 787, the last valid Ecumenical Council of the Church, the Church of Rome, in Her surge for prestige and power, instituted the practice of convening Her own Councils. She used these strictly provincial councils to introduce dogmas without the discussion or sanction of the whole Church. She then attempted to impose these upon the entire Church. This naturally, created an era of discord in the Church, which can be termed more specifically an era of opposition to the methods and practices of the Church of Rome. This opposition culminated in the division of the Church into two parts, the Eastern or Orthodox and Western or Roman Catholic. Further consequential breaks with the Church of Rome of interset to us, were the Reformation begun by Martin Luther in 1517, the Old Catholic Church of Holland in 1724 and ours in 1897.

We wish to make it clear that we are not a new church. Bishop Francis Hodur and his initial Polish immigrant group were devout members of the Church - One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. They wished that the tie connecting them with the Church of all ages should not be broken. They sought abolishment of abuses but without breaking with Catholic Tradition. To keep the purity of the Catholic Faith Bishop Hodur and his coorganizers rejected all the admixtures attempted by the Church of Rome and arched over Her back to the era of the Undivided Church. Our Faith, therefore, is the Faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Our dogmas are only those which specifically are the decrees of the First Four Ecumenical Councils and postulated in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds. We belive that the human being is God's supreme creation and for the purpose that he may eventually abide eternally with God in His Heavenly Kingdom.

We know that sin is the obstacle between God and His creation, man; that man's willful transgressions bring evil consequences in their wake in the manner of the physical law of nature, which says, "for every action there is an opposite and equal reaction."

We believe that God's Grace is absolutely necessary for man's attaining Salvation, and that when man accepts God's Grace and makes himself predisposed to its influence, his deeds become a fulfillment of God's Will and make him acceptable for Salvation.

We believe that the holy Sacraments are the channels by which the Grace of God is made available to man; that Christ established His Church for the purpose of dispensing these Scraments and bringing man to God and Salvation. We are also convinced that Christ established His Church with the Priesthood which is verified, we believe, by His direct charge given to the Eleven as is reported in Matthew 28: 16-20, and also the feeling of need of electing Matthias to replace Judas as recorded in Acts, 1:15-26.

The Holy Scripture and the Tradition (the beginnings of the Christian Church before the New Testament was written) are to us the sources of Catholic Faith, the basis for all our teaching. The Tradition however, must be substantiated by Holy Scripture and can never supersede the Bible.

So much for the catholicism of our Church. Now, what about the "Polish National" in the name of our Church?

"Polish" because the original group of coorganizers was Polish. The language of the liturgy and all traditions continued in the new world were also Polish. The word "National" however, as a translation of the word "narodowy" lost some of its original meaning. "Narodowy" means of the people and by the people-"lud polski." Although the Polish 'national Catholic Church was organized by the "lud polski" this does not refer that She was for them exclusively. Bishop Hodur and his laity always believed that they were called by God to this task because it was the propitious time for fulfilling this mission for the preservation of the Catholic Church. Very shortly after the beginnings of the Polish National Catholic Church, the Lithuanians and the Slovaks joined the Polish people but organized their own National Churches under the jurisdiction of the Polish National Catholic Church. This illustrates that God has communicated with men in diverse cultural conditions. This gives our Church members the firm belief that the gift of God in Christ and His Church is for all men.

We can be justifiably proud of our parents and our grandparents who were guided by the Holy Spirit and dared to join the ranks of those who organized our Polish National Catholic Church in 1897-75 years ago. Today they stand vindicated in the fact that they are being emulated in the recent Roman Catholic changes to the use of the "people's language and more congregational participation in the Holy Mass. This emulation is a great compliment to them which increases our pride in them.